US ISSN 0010-1443

THE COLONIAL NEWSLETTER

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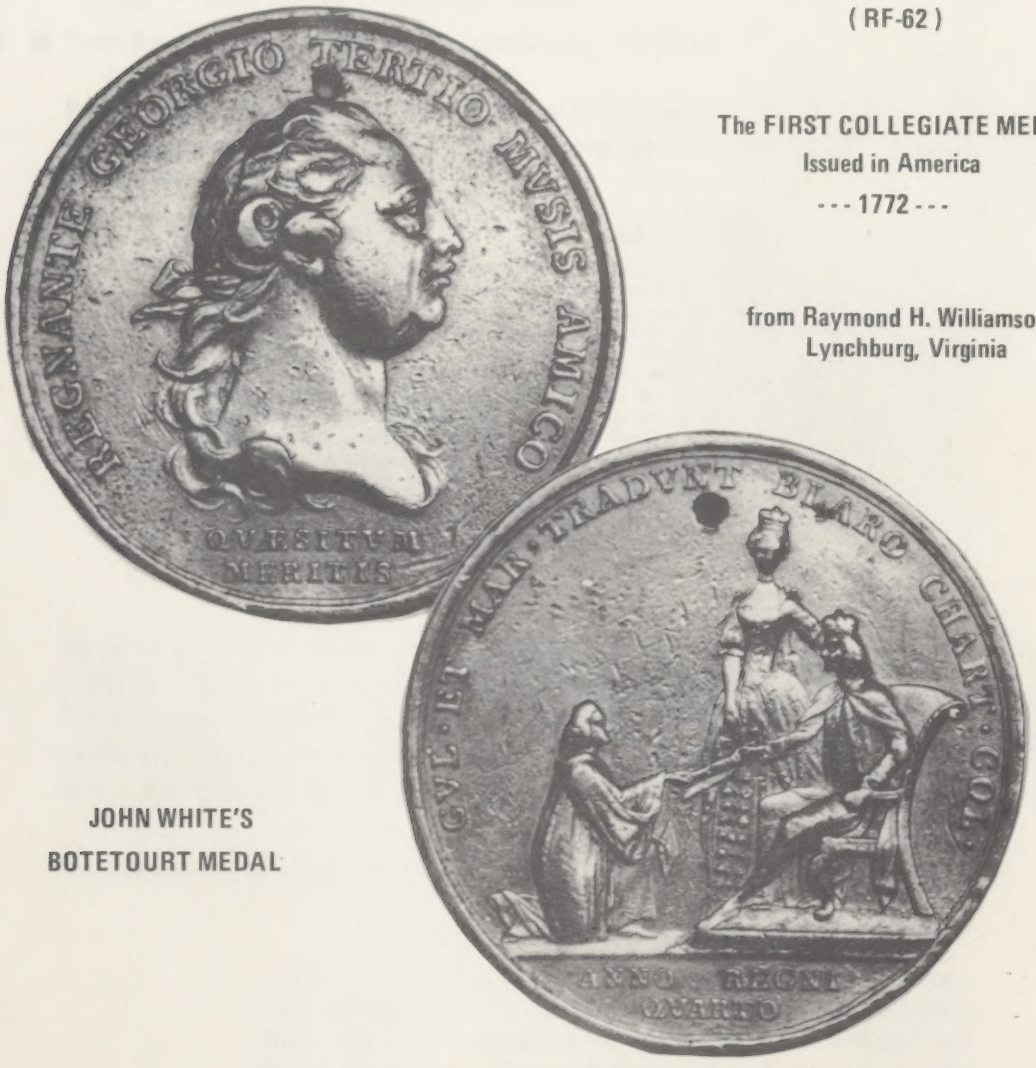
Volume 17, No. 3 October, 1978 Serial No. 53

(RF-62)

The FIRST COLLEGIATE MEDAL
Issued in America
--- 1772 ---

from Raymond H. Williamson;
Lynchburg, Virginia



JOHN WHITE'S
BOTETOURT MEDAL

Photograph enlarged 1.5x

Sequential page 653

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COMMENTS on the COUNTERFEITING of "Spanish Bitts and New England Shillings"
● ● from Eric P. Newman; St. Louis, Missouri (G-3B)

The November, 1977 issue (CNL Vol.16, No. 3, page 609) included a summary of the conviction at Philadelphia in August, 1683 of counterfeiters accused of coining "Spanish Bitts and New England Shillings". This gem of information was located by Edward R. Barnsley in the published minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania (Colonial Records, Philadelphia 1852, Volume I, pp.84-89, 91-92). I think it is important to point out that only Spanish bitts (New Bitts) were counterfeited. Silver heavily adulterated with copper was the material used and the dies were produced in America. According to the report "New England shillings" or "Boston money" were not actually counterfeited even though Governor William Penn accused the defendants of having done so. A Proclamation was issued August 27, 1683 "to put downe Bitts of Coyne, so Called" and there was no mention of either of Boston money or New England shillings in the Proclamation. The confusion was apparently created by Governor Penn because an attempt had been made to pass the counterfeit New Bitts to pay New England men an amount presumably in New England shillings (money of account). When the New England men rejected the New Bitts the passer undertook to have Mary Bartholomew, Among others, change some counterfeit New Bitts for other money so the other money could be paid to New England men.

The reason I feel this fact is so important is that the counterfeiting of coined Massachusetts silver at the time of their extended use has never been documented to my knowledge. Joseph B. Felt in 1839 and Sylvester S. Crosby in 1873 quoted some general counterfeiting matters, but there is no mention of Massachusetts silver being counterfeited for circulation. Noe referred only to clipping and to fabrications and imitations of modern origin. Taxay in 1970 (p.4) listed Pine Tree Shillings Noe 13, 14 and 31 "as probably fabrications as known specimens are very much underweight and seem to have been deliberately struck on small planchets to simulate clipped coins". He also referred to the unique Pine Tree Shilling Noe 12 from the Castine Hoard found in 1840 as "possibly a contemporary counterfeit". In the 1973 Quarterman Publications compilation, The Silver Coinage of Massachusetts, Walter Breen (p. 246) used "unique early counterfeit" in referring to Pine Tree Shillings Noe 12 and 31. Thus it appears that no early documentary evidence has been located that Massachusetts silver was counterfeited for circulation and that only modern opinions existthat certain of the coins were or might have been such counterfeits. Has anyone any references or data to enlighten us on the subject?

● Editor's note: The full text of these proceedings appeared in a subsequent issue of CNL as TN-76 "The First Recorded Trial of Counterfeiters in America". (CNL #51, pages 628-629) JCS